

Durban Inter-Sessional Open-ended Intergovernmental Working Group Session

Statement by Mark C. Storella Charge d’Affaires, a.i. and Head of U.S. Delegation February 16, 2009

Thank you Mr. Chairman. We are very pleased to be here today. We look forward to working with other countries that want the Durban Review Conference to address racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and other forms of intolerance around the world responsibly and productively.

The United States has not participated in Durban Review proceedings previously. Today, we are here to explore with you whether it is possible to move beyond our differences and focus the Durban Review Conference on the racism and xenophobia that seriously persist today in our world. Our delegation here today includes Betty King, the distinguished former Ambassador to ECOSOC and Felice Gaer, a leader in the human rights community who currently serves as Chair of the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom.

You are all aware of the strong reservations the United States has about this document as it singles out Israel for criticism, places unacceptable restrictions on freedom of expression, under the guise of “defaming religion,” and calls for payment of reparations for slavery. Nevertheless, we believe it is important to try to make a positive contribution and to work with member states of the United Nations who, like us, want this process to achieve a successful review conference that focuses on combating racism and discrimination.

We will work with you this week in the hopes that this process will move in a positive direction that would allow the United States to participate in

future preparatory meetings and, if possible, in the Durban Review Conference in April.

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